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PARENT VISITATION

AS A PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL

(TITLE)

BY

FRANKLIN JACK KENNY

FIELD STUDY

~~THESIS~~

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

SPECIALIST IN EDUCATION

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1979

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

May 14, 1979
DATE

May 14, 1979
DATE

PARENT VISITATION
AS A PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL

BY

FRANKLIN JACK KENNY

B. S. in Ed., Eastern Illinois University, 1955
M. S. in Ed., University of Illinois, 1964

ABSTRACT OF A FIELD STUDY

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Specialist in Education at the Graduate School
of Eastern Illinois University

CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS
1979

PARENT VISITATION
AS A PUBLIC RELATIONS TOOL

This paper is primarily a description of a daytime parent visitation program conducted at Stephen Decatur High School, Decatur, Illinois for parents of students new to the school. A traditional night time parent visitation program is described in less detail.

The daytime parent visitation was held over the lunch hour so parents could eat in the school cafeteria at the same time and the same food their children were eating.

The paper also details other activities of the program such as: a slide presentation, a tour of the building, an explanation of the course selection process and a question and answer session.

Emphasis was placed on encouraging minority parents to attend the visitation because the school had had very limited participation by minority parents in other activities. By using the services of a community worker the school was able to get the same percentage of minority parents to attend the visitation as white parents.

Approximately 20 to 25% of the parents who were invited attended the visitations. Some reasons for not having a higher percentage of the parents in attendance are given.

The parents were asked to evaluate the program and the results of the parent evaluation are presented. The parents were extremely supportive of the program. They indicated strong approval of the cafeteria food both in terms of quality and appropriateness.

Five recommendations are made but these three appear to be the most important:

1. The new student parent visitation should be continued on a yearly basis.
2. When parents are being taken on a tour of the building, the counselors should be used as tour guides.
3. School administrators who are looking for ways to improve their school's image should strongly consider implementing the daytime program.

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NEW STUDENT PARENT VISITATION

Preface

Most schools and school systems have tried a variety of methods of improving their public image. The one section of the public that schools should have a good image with is the parents. Most schools feel that they are doing a good job of educating children and they need to get that message across to parents. The easiest way to convince parents that the school is doing a good job is to get the parents into the school to see what is happening. This paper will deal with two programs getting parents to visit school and an evaluation of these programs.

PROGRAM I -- New Student Parents

New Student Parents

It is my position that a parent visitation should be in groups that are small enough to give each parent individual attention. If the parents feel they are just one of many, the visitation will not be as effective as when parents may have their individual questions answered. Our administrative staff felt that we could not invite the parents of all students to school during the school day and be effective in answering individual questions. After discussing several possibilities, the decision was made to invite the parents of freshmen and new students to school while school was in session. Our feeling was that if we continued this process each year that in four years we would have parents who were much better informed about our school than we had before.

We decided to invite one fourth of the parents at a time starting with the first of the alphabet. The first visitation was scheduled for the last week in September. The remainder of the visitations were scheduled for one a week for the first three weeks in October.

How to Make Contact

Our first thought was to write a letter to the parents inviting them to visit school and to send it home with the students. After further consideration, we realized that many of the letters would not get home. We then decided that it was worth the expense of sending the letters by U. S. mail. We sent the letters and enclosed a card (Appendices A and B) to be returned indicating if the parent would or would not attend. (Our data center provided us with gummed labels addressed to parents which simplified the process of addressing envelopes.)

We had an additional concern about getting parents of black students to visit school. Attendance by black parents at other visitations and programs had been minimal. In an effort to encourage more black parents to attend these visitations we sought the help of one of the community workers, Kathy Robinson, who was hired through a Title IV grant. Miss Robinson contacted each black parent after they received the letter of invitation and personally invited them to attend. She provided transportation for any parents who indicated that they could not attend because transportation was a problem.

Program for Visitation

The program for the visitation included:

1. A brief orientation session.
2. Lunch in the cafeteria.
3. A tour of the building.

4. An explanation of the course selection process.
5. Questions and answers.

1. ORIENTATION: The orientation session was held in our auditorium where we welcomed the parents and introduced ourselves and the members of the administrative staff. We explained the purpose of the visitation and gave them a four or five minute slide/tape presentation of the features of the building.
2. LUNCH: In the letter of invitation we indicated that parents should be at the building at 11:45 a.m. We tried to be at the cafeteria by 11:55 a.m. so the parents could go through the line right behind our second lunch line. We made sure that the parents were not provided some special lunch. We wanted them to have the same lunch their child had, so if their child talked about the cafeteria food they would have had at least one lunch just like their child's. The district provided the lunch free to parents. Up to this point, the parents have been very supportive of the meals they have eaten.
3. TOUR: After the parents had eaten lunch, the assistant principal took one-half of the parents and the principal took the other half of the parents on a tour of the building. During the tours many questions were answered and most of the features of the building were explained. Because of the construction of our building, many of the classes in session could be observed by the parents as the tour was conducted. This was an interesting experience for the parents.

4. COURSE SELECTION: Since we try to get parents involved in helping their child select courses for the following year(s), we explained this process and its importance. Parents appeared to be interested in this and were willing to ask questions and tried to understand what was happening. During the explanation we had an excellent opportunity to inform parents that we wanted them to feel free to call the counselors if they had a question about a course or why a particular course had been recommended for their child. Our counselors were present during these sessions and answered many questions that the parents asked.
5. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: We tried to have enough time after the course selection process had been explained to answer general questions that parents might have. The questions may pertain to utility cost, staffing, attendance procedures, bus operations or any one of a "hundred and one" other things that might interest parents. We have found these to be very interesting sessions.

Comments

From 20 to 25% of the parents, black or white, attended these visitation sessions. This seemed like a low percentage and we have looked at some of the possible reasons for such a low response. Since it was held at noon, perhaps both parents were working or it may have been a single parent family with that parent working. It may have been a transportation problem or a baby sitting problem in families where there were younger children. Regardless of the reason, we were a little disappointed with the turnout.

Evaluation

We asked parents to evaluate the program, giving us any suggestions as to how we might improve the program. We have indicated that we would appreciate any written comments--good or bad--that they would care to give us. Up to this point we have had many favorable comments, both verbal and written, and very few negative comments about this particular program.

The following information is a summary of the responses that parents gave us to the questions asked:

1. The letter inviting me to attend the visitation contained enough information.

Yes 97% No 3%

Comments:

1. Should have stated what meeting was about.
2. Didn't know whether lunch was paid for or not.
3. Second time around--Excellent idea.
4. Keep program available to parents.
5. Letter was very direct and to the point.
6. Enjoyed visitation & tour very much.
7. Fine.

2. The tour of the building helped me better understand what the facilities are like.

Yes 99% No 1%

Comments:

1. Glad to see improvements - Energy conservation is an example for youth too.
2. Building is large-but feels like they would know where to go for assistance.
3. Lovely building & set-up--Seems very conducive to learning.
4. Understood the gym & auditorium facilities better.
5. A bit difficult to hear the tour guide.
6. Do you ever have an open house when parents are able to meet the teachers?
7. Would like to have toured down the halls that lead off the main hall, and not just the main classrooms that have store front windows.
8. Would like to have seen labs, shop & maybe visit a classroom.

3. The food in the cafeteria was:

good 84% fair 10% poor 4% No Comment 2%

Comments:

1. Meal was quite starchy - how about a good salad with fish on Friday.
2. Eating area--pleasant. Food was quickly served.
3. Enjoyed the meal & was very good.
4. Wide variety gives each student a choice--to suit them individually.
5. Good variety to choose from.
6. Very healthful.
7. Delicious.
8. Thanks--Plenty for any hungry boy or girl.
9. Quite adequate.

4. The food is appropriate for high school students.

agree 89% disagree undecided 11%

Comments:

1. Very clean.
2. Glad it isn't junk food.
3. All foods on today's (10-19-78) menu has good nutritional value.
4. Child - doesn't care for starchy foods.
5. Need less starches.

5. The program told me what I wanted to know.

Comments:

1. Toured building in summer--This time I received more in-depth information.
2. I would be comfortable calling for any assistance.
3. Excellent program for new parents to learn more about the school.
4. Up to a point. I have questions on the different extra-curricular activities.
5. I think you told me what I needed to know about a few things.
6. Little too general.
7. We are wondering whether the same achievement should be expected from boys and girls in Co-Ed P. E.
8. Asking questions awkward.
9. I myself would like to have a Student Handbook describing some of the programs, classes offered, etc.

6. The length of the visitation was:

about right 95% too long 1% too short 4%

7. Suggestions for improvement or criticisms.

Had Comments - 44%

No Comments - 56%

1. Letter stating what meeting is about - Also choice of times, since it is a series of meetings.
2. It would be helpful if a short presentation by the counselors, as to how they function, were incorporated into the program.
3. Please have the school newspaper include some of the events that are up-coming, instead of write-ups after they are over.
4. You could have broken this large group into small groups with these deans and counselors leading them, maybe people would feel more free to discuss questions. (9-29-78)
5. Would have been better to have had children on tour with the parents.
6. Counselors might like to bring lists of students so we could identify and meet the specific person.
7. Slide presentation was good but needed to be slowed down. The pace of the slides was too rapid.
8. Slides in presentation could be slower. If you haven't seen facilities before they run too fast.
9. Might have a group in late P.M. - For those who can't attend during day time hours.
10. Some working parents are not able to attend at the time offered. Perhaps an "off shift" alternate time might be appropriate.
11. Will there be a low-cal diet for ones who may need it?

Publicity

One other attempt to inform parents and the public of this program was to contact the local newspaper. The Decatur Daily Review ran an article and pictures describing the program (Appendix C). One of the reporters came to the program and went through it like a parent. As a result I think she had a good feel for how a parent would react to the program.

Conclusions

Even though we only had 20 to 25% of the new parents attending the visitation sessions, they were very worthwhile. At least we have 20-25% of the parents better informed, and they have a better basis on which to support the schools and the job we are trying to do. If they are critical of the high school, they will, at least, be better informed critics.

PROGRAM II--EVENING PARENT VISITATIONPLAN

During the evening of November 14, 1978 we held a visitation for parents so they could visit their child's teachers. We have held an open house for the last four years, but this was the first time we had parents follow an abbreviated schedule similar to that which their child follows.

We sent a letter (Appendix D) home with each student which invited the parents to the visitation and gave a brief explanation of the program.

The faculty in past years had favored a program in which all of the faculty was in the gym and the parents moved from one faculty member to another.

During the sixth period we asked the teachers to distribute an evaluation sheet (Appendix E) to the parents so we could get some feedback. As a result of the evaluation I think the following conclusions can be reached.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The parents who attended the visitation favor the plan where they may visit classes.
2. Most of the parents received the kind of information they were interested in.
3. The timing of the visitation was appropriate.
4. We are not solving the problem of the parent who has more than one child in our school.

Program I and IIRecommendations

It is very difficult to tell how much effect a program(s) has on the school's public image. The evaluation that the parents have given us is very supportive and positive about these programs. In fact we have no other parent program for which parents have indicated as much support.

The following recommendations appear to be appropriate:

1. The new student parent visitations should be continued.
2. Additional methods of encouraging more parents to attend the visitations should be explored and implemented.
3. When parents are being taken on a tour of the building the counselors should be used as tour guides. This would give the counselors and parents an opportunity to meet each other and get acquainted in an informal setting.
4. The evening parent visitation should be conducted with the parents following an abbreviated version of their child's schedule.
5. School administrators who are looking for ways to improve their school's image should strongly consider implementing these programs.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

A Letter to Parents



Stephen Decatur High School

1 EDUCATIONAL PARK
DECATUR, ILLINOIS 62526

F. JACK KENNY, Principal
STEVE HENGST, Assistant Principal
WILLIAM DIXON, Dean of Boys
MILDRED WEAVER, Dean of Girls

October 10, 1978

Dear Parents:

We would like to invite you to come to Stephen Decatur High School to become better acquainted with its facilities, personnel and programs. We are sending this letter to a small number of parents and we hope approximately twenty parents will visit on October 19. We will meet in the auditorium at 11:45 A.M., take a tour of the building, eat lunch and have a question and answer session. We expect that we would be finished between 1:15 and 1:30 P.M.

In order that we may know how many parents to expect, would you please fill out the enclosed card and have your son/daughter return it to the office by October 17.

If you have questions about this visitation please feel free to call the school office.

Sincerely,

F. Jack Kenny
Principal

FJK:cjb

Enclosure

APPENDIX B

A Card for Parents to Return

Mr. Kenny:

☐ Count on my being at the meeting for parents.

☐ Sorry, I cannot attend the meeting for parents.

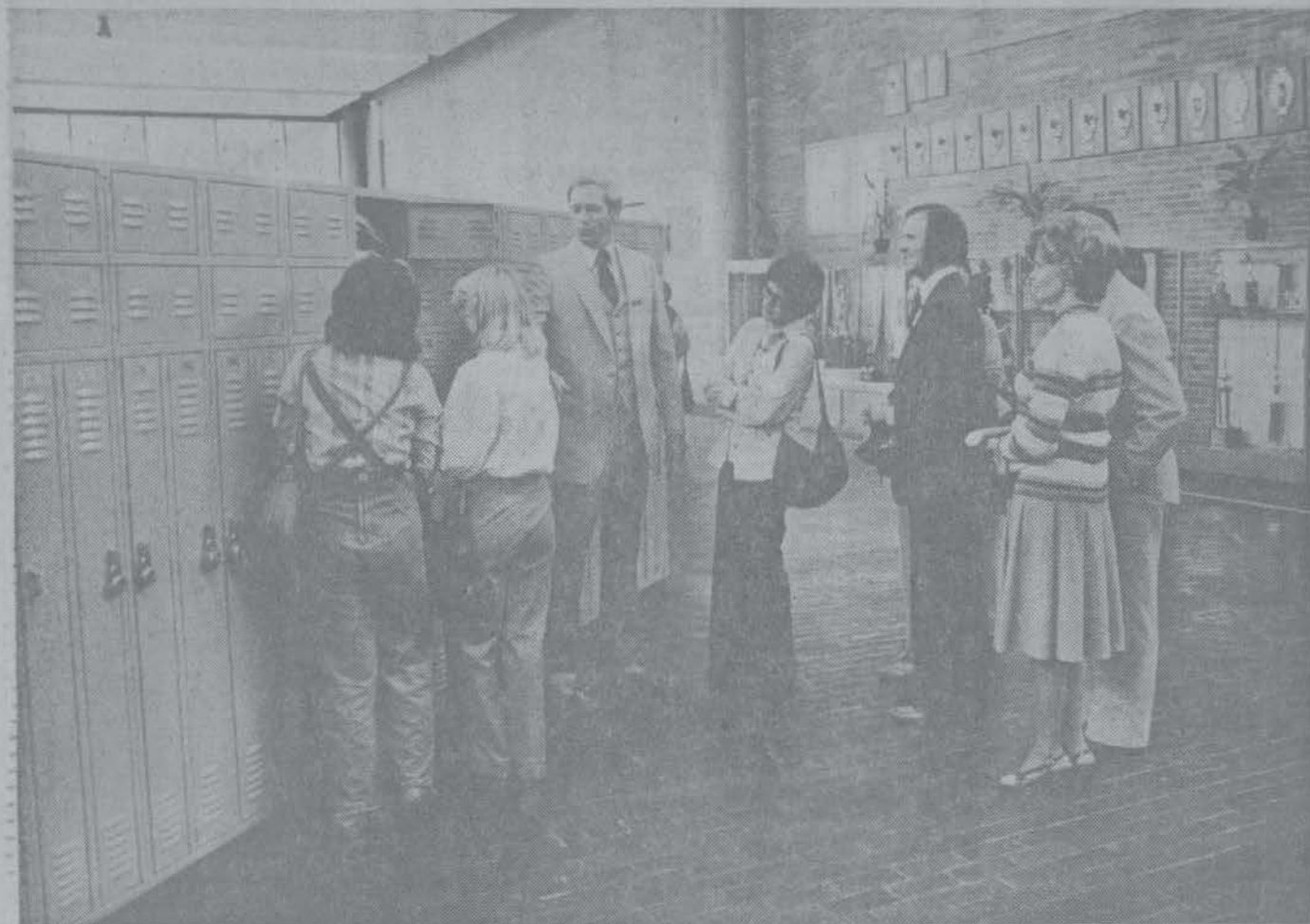
SIGNED

Please return to office 150 by Oct. 17, 1978

Student's Name

APPENDIX C

Newspaper article from The Decatur Daily Review



Staff photos by Doug Gaumon

Jack Kenny, center, describes locker system to parents while students, left, use the lockers.

Parents look at Stephen Decatur

By Ruth Heckathorn

Parents of new Stephen Decatur High School students have been questioning the principal — about cars on campus and counselors, coed physical education, student activities and marijuana.

For the last three weeks school Principal Jack Kenny has been answering

In the schools

the inquiries of groups of about 20 parents each who have come to the school for mid-day orientation sessions.

He's been fielding queries between bites on a hero sandwich and while striding across the rubbery gym floor and past windowfront power mechanics and health classes in the fully air conditioned building.

"I'm a non-smoker. I'd rather not have it at all," the rangy principal in a light brown three-piece suit says, pointing to white-lined smoking areas outside the building.

Still, he notes, availability of the des-

costs, he explains, as will a computer that automatically reduces heat in unused rooms and a closed-in porch soon to be added at the north entrance.

The tour takes parents into the gallery that divides east and west classroom wings, to sample lunch.

Like 400 students in the third lunch shift, the parents eat beef and noodles, potatoes, peas, cranberry sauce, pie and cookies. Or, if they prefer, chili dogs, sandwiches and salads.

Visitors also look at and hear about facilities that many don't know about — just completed tennis courts, an all-weather track and a football field.

Stephen Decatur, they're told, will play its first home game on its own field Nov. 4.

Freshmen can participate in yearbook and student newspaper activities after all, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Neeley of 1122 Regal Ave. discover.

Duane Dudley of 4282 Huston Hills Road finds out students who drive cannot take autos off campus during the 30-minute lunch period.

grades."

The reason students must pick courses by Aug. 1, he explains, is so enough teachers for each subject can be hired.

Most vocational classes fill up and applicants are turned down, says Hengst. Therefore, juniors and seniors with good grades and attendance have the best chance of being accepted for those courses.

He also discussed experience-based career education, retailing, work training and office occupation programs.

By 1:30 p.m. the tour is finished except for visitors' parting comments on a questionnaire.

Several suggest off-shift meeting times for those who work. One wants a handbook describing programs and classes. Another would like to go into a classroom and get a closer look at shops and labs.

"Nice to be included," wrote Carol Briley of 1 Woodland Acres. "Parents many times are pushed out of the picture at this level of education."

ing inside the school
Marijuana?

"Oh, that's a tough one. We're the last ones to know," Kenny says. "We don't detect a lot and we do work at it. I don't know how huge a problem it is."

Marijuana use, he guesses, may be more evident to parents.

"We don't think it's just a school problem. We say to parents, 'Help us.'"

Kenny shows them salmon-colored insulated panels that have replaced windows in the building's galleria center.

The panels will save electric heating

courses, Robert Palat of 3970 Burchard Drive finds out.

Dr. and Mrs. C. Deane Roth of 4159 N. Newcastle Drive tell Kenny they wonder if the same achievement should be expected for boys and girls in coed p.e.

Because Stephen Decatur has 1,380 students and 70 teachers and is a \$7.5 million facility, administrators talk about people, too.

"Encourage your students to be as active as possible," Assistant Principal Stephen Hengst advises. "We find out time and again the kids that are busiest are the happiest and make the best

the visitation is that although this is a very large school the administration is interested in each student and making their high school days as pleasant and enriching as possible," said Mrs. Gilbert Baumann, 16 Berry Drive.

The final tour in the third year of the program, for the remaining 100 new parents, will be next Wednesday.

Even then, it's likely families will still have questions about counselors, cars and coed p.e. and other things.

That's when they should contact Kenny and the deans, counselors and teachers at Stephen Decatur High School.



Principal Kenny and parents watch students in a classroom.

APPENDIX D

A Letter Sent Home for Night Visitation

STEPHEN DECATUR HIGH SCHOOL PARENT VISITATION

The faculty and Booster Club of S.D.H.S. would like to invite you to attend a parent visitation at the school on Tuesday, November 14, 1978. This will give you an opportunity to meet and talk with your child's teachers. We are hoping for a large turnout, so if you would like to talk with a teacher privately, please use this time to arrange a conference. The visitation will be from 7:00 to 8:40 p.m.

The visitation will begin in the auditorium at the north end of the building. When you enter the building fill out a name tag and then enter the auditorium. If you do not have the names of your child's teachers, they will be available in the Galleria. Mr. Kenny will start the evening in the auditorium at 7:00 p.m.

The faculty will be located in their rooms. A map of the location of the rooms will be available at the door. The Booster Club will furnish refreshments in the Galleria.

Please have your child fill in his or her schedule and counselor's name below so you will have the names of the teachers you would like to visit. The counselors will be in the office. We hope the evening will be beneficial to you. Your comments on how we may change and improve this type of program would be appreciated.

Period	Subject	Teacher	Room
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
Counselor			Office

APPENDIX E

A Summary of Parent Evaluation

SUMMARY OF THE PARENT EVALUATION RESPONSES TO THE PARENT VISITATION

PARENTS' VISITATION
EVALUATION

1. If you have attended open house here before do you prefer meeting in the gym or going from room to room?

I prefer meeting in the gym 18 No Comments 7

I prefer going room to room 126

2. Did you get the kind of information in the classroom that you were interested in?

Yes 144 No 1 No Comment 4 Yes & No 2

If no, what additional information would be helpful to you?

1 Comment

Some space for a few personal words concerning my child - the general information is fine, but I am interested in a mini-conference.

3. What time of the year would you prefer to have the parents' visitation?

a. This time of year 120 d. Either a or b 1

b. Earlier in the year 20 e. No preference 4

c. Later in the year 6

4. What day of the week is preferable for the parents' visitation?

Monday 17 No Preference 33

Tuesday 84

Wednesday 15

Thursday 2

5. What suggestions do you have for improving the parents' visitation?

See Comments On Separate Sheets!!!!!!

These comments related to the problem of parents with more than one student:

1. Difficult to follow schedule if more than one student involved.
2. With 2 students, I found it difficult to meet all the teacher's in one evening.
3. What about parents that have more than one student? There was no opportunity to go to both classes.
4. With more than one student, it's difficult to see all the teachers when going room to room.
5. Some of us have 2 students to visit for. It is very hard to visit the teachers of both students when the visitation is scheduled to run a certain length of time and they are at opposite ends of the building.
6. Very difficult juggling schedules for more than one student.
7. A way to handle parents who have more than one child.
8. This type of visitation is good if you have only one student, but for more than one it isn't good. Some teachers took roll call and I'm afraid other teachers might think I wasn't an interested parent if I wasn't there.
9. Meeting in room gives the parent a chance to see the classroom environment, however parents with more than one child in school it does not give both parents a chance to meet with all teachers.

These comments related to having more time in each room:

10. More time with the teachers. Most, or some, of them didn't have adequate time to present their class structure, grading system or their complete program in general.
11. Little more time in each room.
12. Little longer room time.
13. Visiting longer in each class would help.
14. Maybe a little longer time in the classroom.

These comments related to returning to the gym:

15. I liked it much better in gym.
16. Move back to the gym.

These comments related to having all teachers present:

17. It is disappointing to come to meet a particular teacher & then find out he/she isn't here. (I'm aware there are good excuses.)
18. Just wish all the teachers had been here.
19. Please have all teachers attend.

These comments had to do with more than one visitation:

20. One night at the beginning of each semester.
21. I would suggest that you have Freshman & Sophomores on one night and Juniors & Seniors on another night.
22. How about one visitation in early fall and one again in April? By then, we may have more questions.
23. Four times per year for visitation.

These comments had to do with getting more parents to come

24. Same problem as church, getting people here!
25. Try to get more parents to come.
26. Have more parents show up!

The following general comments were made on parents visitation

27. Fine program.
28. We thought it was excellent!
29. It was very enjoyable. Please continue!
30. Each teacher did a very good job. Thank you very much.
31. I enjoyed my evening very much as always.
32. Casual, relaxed program. Students could come with their parents.
33. Each teacher did a fine job of advising us of the class purpose or goal!
34. I do like this type of visitation!!
35. You are doing a good job.
36. This new arrangement is much better than the old one.
37. Excellent school.
38. Good!!!!!!
39. I appreciate the opportunity to meet the teachers and know I may set up a private appointment if I wish.
40. Very well done.
41. We enjoyed the visitation tonight.
42. I thought this idea was super! Much less confusion & not having to wait in line.
43. I have been to quite a few & this was the best by far. ~~Very~~ informative.
44. I am very satisfied with this arrangement. Also, I am very impressed with the good attitude of all the teachers.
45. Well done this evening.
46. Very good!
47. Everything was fine.
48. We enjoyed the evening.
49. I thought we had a real nice program this year.
50. I have enjoyed tonight's program.
51. More activities with students.
52. I would prefer having the teachers in their room and you visit each one at your own leisure.
53. Even out the heat!
54. Some time to at least meet the counselor.
55. Slightly longer time between classes. Approx. 7-8 minutes.